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PAK PRESIDENT SAYS HE WAS ASKED TO 'HIDE IN BUNKER' DURING OP SINDOOR

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari revealed that he was advised to 'hide in a bunker' when India launched Operation Sindoor in May this year

ZARDARI SAYS HE TURNED DOWN THE ADVICE

"My MS (military secretary) came to me and said, 'Sir, the war has started. Let's go to a bunker'," Zardari said. He was speaking at an event in Sindh province to mark the 18th death anniversary of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. Zardari claimed he refused to move to a bunker, quoting himself as saying: "If martyrdom is to come, it will come here."

'KNEW THAT TENSIONS WOULD ESCALATE'

- Zardari said he knew in advance that a conflict was about to break out. "I told him four days earlier a war was going to happen," he said
- India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7, targeting terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pak-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the Pahalgam attack of April 22, which killed 26 civilians

4-DAY

OP SINDOOR IS THE MOST SERIOUS CONFLICT BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN IN DECADES

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

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EXPRESS READ

Settle your water bill arrears via OTS scheme

Bengaluru: Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) announced a One-Time Settlement (OTS) scheme for users with long-standing water bills. Users can settle their arrears in a single instalment, by paying only the principal amount, with "a 100 per cent waiver on interest and penalties" | P2

SC to hear CBI's Unnao rape case plea today

New Delhi: The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a plea by the CBI challenging the Delhi High Court order suspending the life sentence of expelled BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the Unnao rape case. The top court would also hear a separate petition, which has challenged the high court order and sought a stay.

BSF rejects B'desh claims about Hadi killers

No arrests have been made, says Meghalaya DGP on Bangladesh's claim that student leader's killers entered India

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Guwahati

THE Meghalaya Police on Sunday dismissed media reports in Bangladesh that two suspected killers of student leader Sharif Osman Hadi had fled to the northeastern state and that, two persons, who helped the fugitives, have been arrested/detained here.

Quoting a senior official in the country, the *Daily Star* reported that suspects Faisal Karim Masud and Alamgir Sheikh had crossed over into the Indian territory of Meghalaya with the help of local associates.

"According to our information, the suspects entered India via the Haluaghat border. After crossing, they were initially received by an individual named Purti. Later, a taxi driver named Sami transported them to Tura city in Meghalaya," the newspaper quoted Additional Commissioner S N Nazrul Islam in a press conference.

The report further stated that Purti and Sami had been detained by authorities in India. Some other media houses reported that the duo had been arrested.

However, Meghalaya Director General of Police Idashisha Nongrang said, "No arrests have been made."

Border Security Force personnel patrol along the India-Bangladesh border on the outskirts of Agartala in Tripura | PTI

Another senior police official said Meghalaya Police had not received any formal or informal communication from Bangladesh Police or other Bangladesh authorities in this regard.

The BSF also dismissed the reports. "We learnt about the news circulating in media and social media handles. We verified at our end. This is completely false," a senior BSF official told this newspaper.

He further stated that the demography along the Meghalaya-Bangladesh border is such that an outsider is easily identifiable. "There have been many instances where the villagers have identified such persons and helped the BSF," the official stated.

Inquilab Moncho leader Hadi (32) was shot in Dhaka by two motorcycle-borne assailants on December 12 during an election campaign. On December 15, he was airlifted to Singapore for treatment but died three days later. His death triggered nationwide violent protests.

DHAKA-KARACHI FLIGHT

Direct flights between Dhaka and Karachi will start from January, Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh Imran Haider said on Sunday, during a meeting with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus

Dhaka terms attacks on Hindus 'isolated crimes'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

DHAKA on Sunday strongly rejected India's concerns over the safety of religious minorities in Bangladesh and said recent incidents involving members of the Hindu community were "isolated criminal acts" and not reflective of any systematic persecution.

The response came amid international reactions and parallel diplomatic engagements in Dhaka. Responding to a query from IANS, a US State Department spokesperson said the United States "unequivocally condemns religious violence in all its forms" and supports religious freedom, freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly, adding that Washington welcomed steps taken by Bangladesh's interim government to ensure safety and security of all communities.

Reacting to Das's killing, Indian-origin US Congressman Ro Khanna called the lynching "horrific" and urged people to speak out against "vile acts of hatred and bigotry".

Dhaka said that all crimes, regardless of the victim's faith, would be addressed under the rule of law.

India's Ministry of External Ministry had earlier described the continuing violence against minorities in Bangladesh as a matter of "grave concern" and condemned the December 18 lynching of 27-year-old Hindu youth Dipu Chandra Das in Mymensingh city over allegations of blasphemy.

Bangladesh said there were "systematic attempts" to portray isolated criminal incidents as evidence of persecution of Hindus, alleging such narratives were being selectively amplified in parts of India to spread anti-Bangladesh sentiment and undermine bilateral relations.

Bangladesh foreign ministry also disputed India's reference to another recent death of a Hindu man in Rajbari, saying the man was a "criminal."

Maha cops bust 3 factories, seize drugs worth ₹56cr in B'luru

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

WHILE the state government is aiming to make Karnataka drug-free, three drug manufacturing units operating right under the nose of the Bengaluru city police were busted by the Maharashtra Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF). Four persons were arrested, and mephedrone (MD), worth an estimated Rs 55.88 crore, was seized.

This is the second instance of Maharashtra police busting a drug unit in Karnataka. Recently, a similar factory was unearthed in Mysuru, where police seized 187.97 kg of mephedrone worth Rs 381.96 crore and arrested four persons.

The Konkan division of Maharashtra ANTF raided three different locations in Bengaluru, during which the drug manufacturing units were busted. The racket came to light after police arrested a drug peddler, identified as Abdul Khader, and seized drugs worth Rs 1.5 crore on December 21 in Mumbai. During interrogation, he revealed his source, leading the police to Prashanth Yallappa Patil, who hails from Belagavi. Based on Patil's information, the police learnt about three locations from where drugs were being sourced and they turned out to be factories.

One of the factories was operating at Spandana Layout under the Bagaluru police limits and was projected as a business warehouse, another was at NG Gollahalli under Kothanur police limits and was operating as an RJ event management office and the last was at a house in Yerappanahalli under the Avalahalli police limits. P6

PRESIDENTIAL SORTIE

President Droupadi Murmu with Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi on indigenous Kalvari class submarine INS Vaghsheer at Karwar Naval Base. Murmu undertook an over two-hour sortie onboard the indigenously-built submarine | PTI | P9

Y-plus security to West Bengal CEO amid row over SIR

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Centre has provided Y-plus category security cover to West Bengal's Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal in view of safety concerns due to the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in the state, officials said on Sunday.

A team of 11-12 armed personnel of the CISF security wing has been deployed for the CEO's personal and house security. The team has taken charge.

The move follows an order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on December 26.

Sources said there were intelligence inputs about potential threats to the officer.

The SIR exercise to update the electoral rolls is currently underway in West Bengal.

On December 16, the poll panel published the draft electoral rolls, deleting over 58 lakh voters from the list due to death, migration, and non-submission of forms.

It has triggered intense political friction with the ruling Trinamool Congress targeting the Election Commission. On Saturday, the party accused the poll panel of deleting lakhs of voters from the rolls to benefit the BJP ahead of the 2026 assembly elections.

Meanwhile, an association of West Bengal government officers raised objections to deletion of voters bypassing the statutory role of Electoral Registration Officers.

The association also made a representation to Agarwal saying on the date of the draft publication, a considerable number of electors whose forms have not been returned on alleged grounds such as death, migration, absence, or duplication have been deleted from the draft electoral rolls.

FRENCH CINEMA
ICON BRIGITTE BARDOT DIES AT 91

In a cinema career spanning some 28 films and three marriages, Bardot symbolised a nation bursting out of bourgeois respectability, and became one of France's best-known stars | P11

Amid Cong pushback, Digvijaya backtracks on BJP-RSS praise

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

EVEN as the Congress grapples with internal unease triggered by Digvijaya Singh's remarks praising the organisational power of the RSS and the BJP, the senior leader on Sunday went into damage control mode, saying there were no ideological differences within the party and that it stood firmly united under the Nehru-Gandhi leadership.

Speaking to the media, Singh sought to clear the air on suggestions of factionalism and accused the BJP of attempting to create discord within the Nehru-Gandhi family. "There is no difference in ideology. We are all united. The Nehru-Gandhi family is one in which two members have been martyred. I strongly condemn the BJP's attempts to create divisions within this family," he said.

The former chief minister also appeared to walk back his earlier criticism of the party's lack of decentralisation. "Rahul Gandhi has started the decentralisation process from the district level and below. The work is underway and will be completed soon," he added.

Singh reiterated his opposition to the BJP-RSS ideology, saying there was nothing to learn from "Gandhi's killers". "I oppose RSS and BJP ideology," he said.

Singh's earlier remarks did not go down well with several leaders as the BJP seized on them to attack the Congress, terming it as an 'open dissent' against Rahul's leadership.

Meanwhile, Thiruvananthapuram MP Shashi Tharoor extended a guarded support, saying that it is only logical for an organisation to have discipline and be strengthened.

Armed gang loots 5 kg gold in Hunsur daylight robbery

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mysuru

HUNSUR, 45 km from Mysuru, witnessed a daring daylight robbery on Sunday afternoon when a five-member gang on motorbikes, armed with guns, stormed into a jewellery showroom near the town's bus-stand and escaped with gold ornaments weighing around 5 kg. The entire incident, which unfolded in filmy style, was captured on the showroom's CCTV cameras.

The robbery took place around 1.30 pm at a gold and diamond showroom, located in the busy commercial area near Hunsur bus stand. Over 10 staff members were at the showroom when the robbery took place, the police said.

Eyewitnesses and preliminary investigation revealed that the five criminals barged into the showroom, creating panic among the staff. Four of them were wearing masks, while the gang leader had not covered his face fully. He held guns in both hands and threatened the staff, warning them against raising any alarm or resisting them.

The gang went on to loot gold ornaments kept in the display counters and storage area. They swiftly collected the jewellery and fled on three bikes, on which they had arrived.

The showroom staff chased the robbers, but were unable to apprehend them as the accused sped away. No one was injured in the incident, though the staff was left shaken by the incident. CONTINUED ON: P7

Teams formed

Special teams have been formed to crack the case, while check-posts were alerted

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